PROTESTANT HOUR

SERMON #2 - SUMMARY

# OH, THE PLACES YOU WILL GO!

JOHN M. BUCHANAN, PASTOR
FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO

Scripture

Mark 1:16-20

Oh, The Places You Will Go is based on two Biblical stories, the journey of the children of Israel over the Jordan and into the promised land and Jesus' call to the disciples to leave their fishing nets and follow him. The title is from a Dr. Seuss book.

The sermon suggests that the life of faith is a journey, full of risks and uncertainties, but that God is with us and calls us to live faithfully.

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SCRIPTURE
MARK 1:16-20

Let me set a little the scene

MOSES IS DEAD. AFTER FORTY YEARS OF WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL HAVE ARRIVED AT A RIVER. ON THE OTHER SIDE THEY CAN SEE THEIR DESTINATION, THE PROMISED LAND.

JOSHUA 1:1-2, 5

"AFTER THE DEATH OF MOSES THE SERVANT OF THE LORD, THE LORD SPOKE TO JOSHUA SON OF NUN, MOSES' ASSISTANT, SAYING, "MY SERVANT MOSES IS DEAD. NOW PROCEED TO CROSS THE JORDAN, YOU AND ALL THIS PEOPLE, INTO THE LAND THAT I AM GIVING TO THEM, TO THE ISRAELITES. ...

the account is in the Book of Joshua 1st ch.



Edmund Steimle
Ernie Campbell
John Vannorsdall

NO ONE SHALL BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST YOU ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE. AS I WAS WITH MOSES, SO I WILL BE WITH YOU; I WILL NOT FAIL YOU OR FORSAKE YOU."

YOU MAY NOT IDENTIFY WITH MUCH IN THE BIBLE. YOU MAY NOT EVER HAVE SEEN A BURNING BUSH, AND THE VOICE OF GOD MAY NEVER HAVE SPOKEN DIRECTLY TO YOU, AND YOU MAY NEVER HAVE SEEN ANYONE WALK ON WATER. AND YOU MAY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT WHATEVER IT IS THAT THE BIBLE IS ABOUT, IT IS ABOUT THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO OTHER PEOPLE.

HOWEVER. . . THERE IS NOT A ONE OF US WHO CANNOT IDENTIFY WITH THOSE PEOPLE GATHERED ON THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN RIVER, ALL THEIR BELONGINGS, ALL THEIR TRADITIONS, ALL THEIR HISTORY BEHIND THEM, PEERING THROUGH MORNING MIST INTO THE FUTURE, THE PROMISED LAND. HOW ARE THEY FEELING THAT MORNING, FORTY YEARS

OF NOMADIC WANDERING ABOUT TO COME TO AN END. . . FOUR DECADES OF A ROUTINE THEY HAD LONG AGO ACCOMMODATED ABOUT TO CONFRONT A RADICALLY NEW FUTURE? MY GUESS IS THAT THEY ARE ANXIOUS, SCARED. THEY FEEL LIKE GOING BACK, AND IF THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE, THEY ARE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING GOING NO FURTHER. THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT STOPPING RIGHT THERE - "ON THE VERGE OF JORDAN" - AS THE OLD HYMN PUTS IT. WHICH IS TO SAY, THEY ARE FEELING A LOT LIKE YOU AND I FEEL MUCH OF THE TIME.

WHO CAN'T IDENTIFY WITH THEM? PERSONAL CHANGE, MOVEMENT, IS A LIFE REALITY. ONE OF FIVE OF US MAKES AN ACTUAL MOVE EVERY YEAR AND IF WE'RE NOT MOVING LOCATIONS, WE'RE MOVING FROM ONE JOB TO THE NEXT, OR TRYING TO, OR PLANNING TO, OR HOPING AND WISHING THAT WE COULD.

PERHAPS YOU FIND YOURSELF THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE, NAMELY THAT THERE IS A DAY AHEAD WHEN YOU NEED TO FIND SOMETHING TO DO OTHER THAN THE JOB WHICH HAS BEEN YOUR LIFE FOR ALL THESE YEARS. THAT CHANGE COMES AFTER ABOUT THE SAME NUMBER OF YEARS ISRAEL WANDERED IN THE WILDERNESS BEFORE ENDING UP ON THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN, PEERING THROUGH THE MORNING MIST INTO THE PROMISED LAND AND SHIVERING, NOT ONLY BECAUSE IT WAS CHILLY THAT DAY. WHO DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT THAT EXPERIENCE?

MY PROPOSAL THIS MORNING IS THAT THE LIFE OF FAITHFULNESS IS A JOURNEY, A MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE. THE STORY OF FAITH IN THE BIBLE IS NOT AN ACCOUNT OF PEOPLE SITTING DOWN AND FIGURING OUT WHAT THEY BELIEVE. IT IS A STORY OF PEOPLE MOVING ON A JOURNEY, A PILGRIMAGE. IT BEGINS WHEN AN ELDERLY COUPLE,

Abraham and Sarah, hear God's promise and God's call and in their old age do something very unlikely - pick up and move. And the story continues when the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, urged, cajoled, pushed and prodded by Moses, finally pack up and move out of Egypt and travel through the desert for forty years.

And, of course, there is the chapter of the story to which we have our closest affinity which begins when a man walks by a group of fishermen mending their nets and says:

"Come, follow me."

It often seems that moving, traveling, getting up and going somewhere new is what faithfulness means in the Bible. And it is always an experience of exhilaration and energy ultimately, but first

IT IS AN EXPERIENCE OF ANXIETY AND FEAR AND RELUCTANCE.

IN FACT SOMETIMES IT SEEMS THAT THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH IN THE BIBLE IS NOT SIN OR UNBELIEF, BUT THE REFUSAL TO MOVE.

THE TITLE OF THIS SERMON COMES FROM A DISTINGUISHED MAN OF LETTERS; A COMMENTATOR ON MODERN LIFE, THE LATE DR. SEUSS. DR. SEUSS WROTE WONDERFUL CHILDREN'S BOOKS WHICH SOMEHOW ALSO MANAGED TO BE WONDERFULLY ADULT BOOKS. OH, THE PLACES YOU'LL GO IS A BOOK FOR GRADUATES OR FOR ANYONE ABOUT TO MOVE INTO A NEW FUTURE. I FOUND IN IT, A WORD FOR THOSE PEOPLE PEERING THROUGH THE MIST OF THE RIVER INTO THE PROMISED LAND, AND GOD'S PERSONAL WORD FOR EACH OF US.

"CONGRATULATIONS!
TODAY IS YOUR DAY.
YOU'RE OFF TO GREAT PLACES!

You're off and away!

You have brains in your head

You have feet in your shoes

You can steer yourself

any direction you choose.

You're on your own.

And you know what you know.

And you are the guy who'll

decide where to go."

There are some risks. Dr. Seuss warns that the going will not always be smooth or easy.

"I'm sorry to say so

but sadly, it's true

that Bang-ups

and Hang-ups

can happen to you.

You will come to a place where

the streets are not marked.

Some windows are lighted.

But mostly they're dark.

A PLACE YOU COULD SPRAIN

BOTH YOUR ELBOW AND CHIN.

DO YOU DARE STAY OUT?

DO YOU DARE GO IN?"

SOMETIMES IT SEEMS THAT THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH IN THE BIBLE IS NOT SIN OR HERESY BUT THE REFUSAL TO GET UP AND MOVE.

ALVIN TOFFLER'S IMPORTANT BOOK, FUTURE SHOCK, TAUGHT US THAT IN A TIME OF RAPID SOCIAL CHANGE, WHEN EVERYTHING IS MOVING AND NOTHING IS PINNED DOWN YOU AND I ARE INCLINED TO CREATE FOR OURSELVES WHAT TOFFLER CALLED "PERSONAL SECURITY ZONES," AREAS OF LIFE THAT ARE STABLE, UNCHANGING, OFTEN NOSTALGICALLY, BASED ON THE PAST.

REGARDLESS OF THE FACT THAT FAITH IN THE BIBLE IS DESCRIBED AS A JOURNEY, A MOVING FROM HERE TO THERE, WE WANT STABILITY. ( "GIVE ME THAT OLD TIME

RELIGION. IF IT WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR MOSES, IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME." WE DON'T WANT TO FOLLOW JESUS INTO A NEW FUTURE.

MARTIN MARTY, IN A NOW FAMOUS QUIP, ONCE SAID THAT THE LAST SEVEN WORDS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH WILL BE,

"WE NEVER DID IT THAT WAY BEFORE."

THE STORY IS TOLD OF A LITTLE GIRL WATCHING HER MOTHER PREPARE TO BAKE A HAM. AT THE END OF THE PROCESS, JUST BEFORE PLACING THE HAM IN THE BAKING PAN, SHE CUT A SMALL SECTION OFF EACH END.

"WHY DO YOU DO THAT, MOMMY?" THE LITTLE GIRL ASKED. "WHY DID YOU CUT THE ENDS OFF THE HAM?"

HER MOTHER ANSWERED:

"THAT'S HOW MY MOTHER DID IT. LET'S ASK HER."

So they called on the grandmother and asked her why she cut the ends off the ham and she responded,

"Why, I'm not sure I know. That's how my mother did it."

So, off they went to see great-grandmother, and they asked her why she cut the ends off the ham before baking it. And the old woman, in her nineties, thought for a long time and finally said,

"I remember now. I cut the ends off the ham

because my baking pan was too small."

One day, at the beginning of the story, he was walking beside the Sea of Galilee. He saw two men casting their net. Their names were Simon and Andrew. He said to them, "Follow me." And that is what they did. . . laid down their

NET AND FOLLOWED. HE SAW TWO MORE, JAMES AND JOHN, MENDING THEIR GEAR, WITH THEIR FATHER SITTING IN THEIR FISHING BOAT. HE SAID, "FOLLOW ME." AND THAT IS WHAT THEY DID.

WE WISH THERE WERE MORE TO IT THAN THAT. WE WISH WE KNEW ABOUT THEM AND THEIR LIVES AND WHAT MADE THEM SO READY TO MOVE, SO WILLING TO ACCEPT THE RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES AND INSECURITIES IMPLIED IN WALKING AWAY FROM JOB AND FAMILY AND TRADITION, INTO AN UNKNOWN FUTURE. WE WISH WE KNEW THAT THEY KNEW HIM AND HAD REASON FOR CONFIDENCE IN HIM, KNEW WHERE HE WAS LEADING THEM. BUT WE DON'T. THE ACCOUNT STARTLES ME EVERY TIME I READ IT WITH ITS LEANNESS: INVITATION - COMMAND - RESPONSE. AND I HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THIS IS WHAT THE BIBLE WANTS TO SAY AND THAT THIS IS A

WORD FROM THE LORD TO ME - TO ALL OF US AND EACH OF US.

DOUGLAS JOHN HALL, A CANADIAN THEOLOGIAN WHO HAS THOUGHT AND WRITTEN ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE YOUR LIFE FAITHFULLY TEACHES THAT IT BEGINS WITH A SUMMONS TO FOLLOW, AND CONTINUES IN A LIFE WHICH IS MOVING ALWAYS MORE DEEPLY INTO THE LIFE OF THE WORLD, A JOURNEY THAT CAN END UP AT THE CROSS; A PILGRIMAGE CHARACTERIZED BY LIVING FOR OTHERS, BY LOVING THE WORLD FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, BY GIVING ONE'S RESOURCES, SKILLS, PASSION, LOVE AND LIFE ITSELF - TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST.

IT'S NOT EASY. IT'S NOT EASY TO DO THAT, PARTICULARLY IN THIS TIME AND PLACE. IN THE CULTURE OF DISBELIEF, THE BOOK EVERYBODY IS READING, THE AUTHOR, YALE PROFESSOR, STEPHEN CARTER, CONTENDS THAT WE ARE NOT AN ATHEISTIC CULTURE SO

MUCH AS AN INDIFFERENT ONE WHEN IT COMES TO RELIGION. WE CAN TOLERATE A BIT OF RELIGION. IN FACT A LITTLE RELIGION IS GOOD - A NECESSARY POLITICAL ASSET, PART OF THE PERSONAL APPEAL PACKAGE - ~~HARRY~~ spouse ~~WIFE, SMILING CHILDREN OF THE ASPIRING POLITICAL CANDIDATE~~. SO LONG AS IT IS NOT TAKEN TOO SERIOUSLY. WILLIAM BUCKLEY SAID IF YOU MENTION GOD ONCE AT A NEW YORK DINNER PARTY YOU ARE MET WITH STONY SILENCE. MENTION GOD TWICE AND YOU DON'T GET INVITED TO ANY MORE DINNER PARTIES.

STEPHEN CARTER SAYS AMERICAN CULTURE REGARDS ACCEPTABLE RELIGION AS A KIND OF PERSONAL HOBBY LIKE STAMP COLLECTING OR MODEL TRAINS.

AND SO FOR YOU AND ME THE CALL CAN BE A RADICAL SUMMONS TO BE DIFFERENT, TO ACT DIFFERENTLY, TO MARCH TO A DIFFERENT DRUMMER, TO TRAVEL IN A NEW AND DIFFER-

ENT DIRECTION, TO LIVE FOR OTHERS, TO GIVE LIFE AWAY. . . TO PUT ON THE LINE MY ENERGY, MY TIME, MY RESOURCES. . . IN LOVE FOR MY NEIGHBORS, THE CHILDREN, THE FUTURE. . . MY LORD.

JESUS CALLED HIS DISCIPLES TO GET UP FROM WHAT THEY WERE DOING AND TO FOLLOW HIM. HE PROMISED THEM NEW LIFE. HE SAID THEY WOULD ACTUALLY FIND THEIR LIVES WHEN THEY GOT UP FROM WHAT THEY WERE DOING AND MOVED INTO A NEW FUTURE, CHARACTERIZED BY GIVING LIFE AWAY.

THAT IS OUR SECRET. THE PROMISE IS ADVENTURE, SURPRISE, CHALLENGE, AND THROUGH IT ALL - LIFE.

Dr Seuss

"OUT THERE THINGS CAN HAPPEN
AND FREQUENTLY DO
TO PEOPLE AS BRAINY
AND FOOTSY AS YOU." DR.
SEUSS ADVISES.

"And when things start to
happen,
don't worry. Don't stew.
Just go right along.
You'll start happening too."

Oh, the places you will go! Like Dr. Seuss, W. H. Auden thought about the journey and wrote what I think are among the most hauntingly beautiful lines. . .

"He is the way
Follow Him through the Land of
Unlikeness
You will see rare beasts,
and have unique adventures.

"He is the truth.
Seek him in the kingdom of
anxiety,
You will come to a great city

THAT HAS EXPECTED YOUR RETURN
FOR YEARS.
"HE IS THE LIFE.
LOVE HIM IN THE WORLD OF THE
FLESH.
AND AT YOUR MARRIAGE ALL ITS
OCCASIONS
SHALL DANCE WITH JOY."

JESUS SAID,

"COME. . . FOLLOW ME. . ."

AMEN.